B. The Tribal Community

178 The scattering of the population over wide areas and their unstable manner of living, both a result of the climatic conditions of the country, has not permitted the social and civil life of the Hottentots to establish rigid norms. In addition, the confusions of the last years have swept away the ancient customs that had persisted until recently, so that a unified presentation of the social life of the Hottentots in their state and community is impossible today. The traveler [318] can only note those basic beliefs that he finds in his dealings with the natives which are still alive among the people even though they may not be publicly expressed. The little that I can report here concerns the Hottentots' views about property, sexual relations, and power.

1. Property

423 The only instances of private ownership of land probably occur only in the nara-fields of the Kuiseb region behind Walvis Bay. The hut is movable property and the so-called "gardens" were originally foreign to the Hottentot and do not count here. The usable stretches of land, the pasture areas, are common property of the families who have their cattle there. The right to this pasture area exists only as long as no stronger community contests it. Battles for pastures and cattle have been fought by the Hottentots among [721] themselves from time immemorial. The lack of organization beyond the narrow tribal bounds has contributed greatly to the splintering of national [619] power.

422 Within the tribe (another ethic exists in regard to the white man) private ownership of movable property, especially cattle, is sufficiently protected. Theft is considered a serious wrong and is very severely punished (see Power).

426 Repayment of a debt (again only among themselves) is considered a matter of honor but is often taken lightly enough: "!aũs ga ~~#~~areẓa ota nĩ ra ma tsi," i.e. When the rock-rabbit gets a tail (i.e. never), I will give it back to you."

425 In spite of the Hottentot's strictness in preserving his own private property rights, he is not at all miserly. He not only divides the last thing he has with his own people, he is (and was particularly so as all the older accounts testify) particularly hospitable to passing strangers. It would be superfluous [574] to prove again that this hospitality was not based on a shrewd expectation of gaining some advantage, but on a deeply rooted feeling of brotherhood.

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604 circumspection towards her, so his children have to treat her with the greatest deference. To them also she is *tàras* or *gei taras*. On the other hand, the relation of a man to his sister's children is one of the greatest indulgence and goodwill. A boy can do almost anything 604 at his maternal uncle's home without being blamed for it. He can take, 425 without asking, any of the specially fine animals among his uncle's herds, and the uncle has no redress but to take ugly misformed animals from his nephew's herds. This exchange, *//núri //gab* or *//núri //as*, is still practised by the Naman to-day. It extends over all aspects of portable property—karosses, utensils, implements, and so on, as well as livestock—and always the nephew has the privilege of helping himself to some fine specimen of any object in his uncle's possession, while the latter may only lay hands upon poor specimens, such as broken pots, tattered karosses, and other damaged objects. In no case is the exercise of this mutual exploitation regarded as abuse, however far it is carried by one partner or the other.[1]

Girls' Puberty Ceremonies

881 The attainment of puberty in the case of both boys and girls was marked among the Hottentots by the performance of special rites. The boys' puberty ceremonies seem now to have completely lapsed; those of the girls, on the other hand, are even to-day carefully observe damong the Naman. They were noted as far back as 1778 by Wikar,[2] and are mentioned by a number of subsequent writers,[3] but the first comprehensive account of them is contained in the recent descriptions given by Mrs. Hoernlé.[4] Her observations in most cases corroborate the more or less isolated details previously published, and show that in their main outline at least these rites have undergone hardly any significant change in the course of the last century and a half.

[145] As soon as a girl has her first period, when she is said to *kharu*, which generally happens between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, she at once tells either her girl friends or some older female relative. Through this intermediary her mother is informed. The latter then

[1] Hoernlé, op. cit., 22–3; Olpp, *Angra Pequena*, 25; Wandres, "Die Khoi-Khoin," 315–16; Schultze, op. cit., 303.

[2] "Berigt aan den Heere van Plettenberg," 99–100.

[3] Alexander, *Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, i, 169; Hahn, "Die Nama-Hotentotten," 307; Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, 97; von François, *Nama und Damara*, 213; Schultze, *Namaland und Kalahari*, 295–7; Vedder, "The Nama," 136.

[4] "The Conception of Inau among the Hottentots," 70–4; *idem*, "Social Value of Water among the Naman," 523–4.

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775 to encroachment upon the territory of another. There is unfortunately
769 no other record of such usages to be observed when visiting a strange place, or linking up the occupation of land with supernatural agencies. Whether similar usages did exist among the Cape Hottentots, but have escaped observation, or whether in the case of the Naman, and especially of the Orlams, European ideas had completely overshadowed them in practice, cannot now be determined. Certainly the great freedom with which the Hottentots appear to have wandered from place to place, from their own territory into that of another tribe, does not argue in favour of any pronounced dread of the ghosts haunting such places, nor does the undoubted fact that disputes over the possession of land were frequent.

423 All the land claimed by a tribe was the common property of that tribe. It could under no circumstances become the property of an
425 individual, nor was it the property of the chief; and it was generally regarded as inalienable. In the early Cape Records several instances are noted of land having been "sold" to the colonists by Hottentot chiefs. It is more than probable that such "sales" were looked upon by the natives themselves not as alienation but as the granting of usufruct, and the "purchase money" as analogous to tribute paid for this use. Even in more recent times, when the concepts of sale and purchase had become generally familiar to the Hottentots, the alienation of land to other tribes or peoples was extremely rare. The chief had no right to dispose of the land or of any portion of it without first obtaining the consent of the families under his rule, and the purchase money had to be divided equally amongst them.[1]

423 Every member of the tribe had a right as such to the use of its land, water, and grazing for himself, his family, and his stock. He could move freely over the tribal lands, and erect his hut wherever he pleased, without restriction or interference by the chief or anybody else. These rights, however, were merely those of usufruct, and in no case implied full ownership to the exclusion of others.[2] The only instance recorded of recognized private ownership of land or its resources occurs even to-day in the Nara bushveld of the Kuiseb regions behind Walvis Bay. Here each Topnaar family has an hereditary claim to certain */nara* bushes and their fruit. Trespass by other members of the tribe is reported to the chief and dealt with by him; but if the

[1] Wandres, "Ueber das Recht der Naman," 675, 684; *Report on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 75–6; Vedder, "The Nama," 144; Kohler, "Das Recht der Hottentotten," 350.
[2] *Report on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 76; Schultze, *Namaland und Kalahari*, 197.

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thief is a Bergdama or a Bushman, he is tracked and simply shot down, the chief as a rule taking no notice at all of such cases, and, where he does, never siding with the party of the thief.[1]

In the other Nama tribes there seem to have been no private rights of this nature. In certain respects, however, there was a limitation to unrestricted exploitation of the land and its resources by any member of the tribe. Hunting rights over the tribal land, for example, were common to all, but the game was regarded as the herds of the chief. Anybody shooting big game was therefore expected to give him the head and the four lower legs of the animal, while of small game he received portions of the meat. Refusal to yield this tribute was punished. Pasture lands, again, were also common to all, but the chief could order certain grazing grounds to be vacated in order that they might be rested. His consent was also necessary if the inhabitants of any kraal wished to burn the veld shortly before the rainy season, so that when the first rains fell new juicy grass might spring up. These regulations, of course, do not involve interference with established personal rights, but are to be regarded rather as the exercise of recognized control vested in the chieftainship.[2]

In other directions we find recognition given to the prior rights of an individual. If a man dug a well or opened a spring, it was regarded as under his special authority, and, after inspection by the chief, was named after him. Every passer-by had to have his permission before using the water, but it was equally his duty to see that no stranger or his stock was denied access to it. Any man, again, who found a swarm of wild bees in the cleft of a rock or in the hollow of a tree could acquire rights of ownership over their honey by breaking a few twigs and laying them in front of the hive. Whoever then ignored this sign and took away the honey was regarded as a thief and had to recompense the owner. But here also the chief or the head of the kraal exercised some measure of control. If the swarm was still young, it might not be molested, under penalty of punishment, and the owner was also punished if by extracting all the honey he caused the swarm to wander away elsewhere. Moreover, he was expected to give several good combs of the honey to the chief or the kraal head.[3] The private rights casually acquired in this way should not, however, be confused in nature with those noted above to the */nara* bushes, which are based on heredity and shared equally by all members of the tribe.

[1] Schultze, op. cit., 197, 312.
[2] Wandres, op. cit., 675–6; *Report on the Natives of S.W.A.*, 76. [3] Wandres, loc. cit.

Nowadays each ox and cow
231 552 [192] is generally given a name of Dutch origin, to which it often answers; formerly cattle were designated rather according to their colour or physical development. Schultze records nineteen such terms in use among the Naman for horned cattle, six for goats, and three for sheep.[1]

231 425 438 Cattle may be acquired in several different ways. Every child in a wealthy family may have some animals set aside for it soon after birth, and a portion is usually given at marriage, both to sons and to daughters, while a man's herds are also divided after his death among his heirs. Cattle may further be acquired by means of barter with such objects as milk pots and weapons, and in recent times also European trade goods. Wandres mentions the case of a wealthy cattle-owner known to him among the Bondelswarts, who laid the foundations of his prosperity by the manufacture of wooden milk pails which he bartered for cattle. We know also that cattle-raiding, both among the Hottentots themselves and on other peoples, such as the OvaHerero, was a common practice in the past, but we have no definite record as to how cattle obtained in this way were divided.

231 425 463 Service with Europeans in order to obtain the means of purchasing cattle was common already in Kolb's time, and is possibly the principal method employed nowadays. Another common method, in use among the Hottentots themselves, is the herding of another man's cattle in return for part of the increase. A wealthy cattle-owner will place some of his stock under the care of an impoverished tribesman, allowing him to use the milk for his own nourishment and to claim half the increase. With good management a herdsman can in a few years acquire quite a respectable herd of his own in this way. Even young boys will hire their services to cattle-owners, receiving at first an annual payment of one or more sheep or goats, according to the size of the herds under their care, and acquiring later the right to half of the increase. A good herdsman generally remains with his master for life, even although he has accumulated some stock of his own. This is looked after by his children or his relatives, while he himself becomes the chief herdsman of his master.[2]

234 462 The milk of their cows is the staple article of diet with the Hottentots. The milking is done by the women and girls, and only

[1] Op. cit., 264–7.
[2] Wandres, "Ueber das Recht der Naman," 677–8; Kolb, *Vorgebirge der Guten Hoffnung*, 78–9; Tindall, *Great Namaqualand*, 42.

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or camp hungry, especially if of the same tribe; he is welcome, even in the owner's absence, to help himself to whatever there is.

It is customs such as these which have given rise to the use of the term "communism" in regard to the property laws of the Hottentots. It should by now be evident, however, that underlying the undoubtedly far-reaching liberality of the people there is always a clear recognition of private property rights. The Hottentot shares his food with others because he has the right to dispose of it, not because they have an equally legitimate claim to it; and this applies still more to live stock and objects of material culture.

This point is borne out by the special reciprocal relationship, *soregus*, to which reference has already been made.[1] This relationship, also known as *magus*, to give one another, must be ceremonially entered upon between the two persons concerned, and implies, as we have seen, mutual obligation and assistance in all aspects of life—they may refuse each other nothing. In practice this applies especially to property, where each may demand or take from the other whatever he pleases, and may not be refused.

Tindall gives a description of this custom which illustrates rather drastically its full implications in regard to property.[2] "It is usual among them [the Naman] to carry on a kind of 'maatschappy' or partnership. Two men, living perhaps three or four hundred miles apart, 'make mates,' the understanding is that each may take from the other whatever he pleases. They profess to believe that this is a very profitable kind of arrangement, and it is difficult to persuade them of the contrary. The following instance will illustrate the extent to which this 'magu' or 'give-each-other' system proceeds. A poor man at Nisbet Bath, had, by diligence, obtained a horse and gun, he had a good hat, a very decent suit of clothes, a warm overcoat, and his wife had a tolerably respectable wardrobe. One fine morning a mate, with whom he had in an evil hour entered into partnership, turned up from the borders of Damaraland, and claimed as his right, horse, gun, hat, clothes, coat, and all his wife's apparel, except her undress, and with these he departed with true native sang froid, leaving the other his tattered garments and riddled hat, which had been so repeatedly patched, that it was almost impossible to discern the original stuff. The probable sequel to this affair would be that the man would return his mate's visit, who would either manage to avoid

[1] Cf. Schultze, op. cit., 318–19; Wandres, "Ueber das Recht der Naman," 682.
[2] Op. cit., 40–2.

[See cat. 116, p. 243. —Analyst]

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425 him or get all his valuable cattle out of the way; and yet not the least suspicion would be awakened that there was any villainy or 572 dishonesty in the matter."

Wikar, himself a party to such a compact, speaks of it in far more generous terms.[1] "An old father and captain of the Bushmen (*sic*) named Ougaa came to me this evening and proposed to take me on as his bond brother ('*opligtbroer*'), to which I was agreeable, but I said that I had no cattle to give him. He replied however that tobacco would do just as well as cattle from me; if I got cattle during his lifetime then we could give them to one another, if not he would still be my brother and never leave me in the lurch but would help and be faithful to me. And this was indeed the case, for I must acknowledge before God and man that he was to me not merely as a brother but even as a father in all my sorrow, distress, hunger and bodily danger. According to Hottentot practice I might now refuse him nothing for which he asked me and which I had, I must help him and stand beside him in everything, and so too must he act towards me."

The information relating to this custom is on the whole too fragmentary to enable one to determine its full function in Hottentot life. That it is not limited to exchange of goods is shown by the [838 837] fact, as we have seen, that it easily lends itself to homosexual practices, where the two persons are of the same sex, and possibly even to wife-exchange, if Wikar's description of the latter can be regarded as another illustration of the usages associated with the *soregus*. But nowhere is any analysis made of the respective social status of the two persons concerned, of the circumstances under which the compact is entered upon, of the extent to which it is practised, and of all its implications. In the absence of such an analysis, and even of the full concrete data upon which it can be based, speculation as to the real meaning of the custom can only be tentative. Tindall's description may possibly furnish one of the underlying motives, in the sense that the compact may be regarded as a means of ensuring protection and hospitality when one is visiting a distant locality; but there are obviously other motives inducing people to enter into such a relationship, and the custom is well worth studying in more detail than has yet been done. As far as the present discussion concerning property is concerned, the very fact that such a system of exchange and even exploitation as is implied in the compact must be

[1] Op. cit., 85–6.

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ceremonially initiated between two special individuals is sufficient argument against the existence of communism among the Hottentots.

Somewhat akin to the *soregus*, from the economic point of view, is the *//nuri //gab*, the exchange of goods between a man and his sister's son. Here, however, as we have seen, the material advantages are all in favour of the nephew. This economic relationship is based directly on a kinship status, and therefore allows us to see the exchange of goods in a wider social setting, as part of a general pattern of behaviour. The privileged position of the nephew in regard to his mother's brother is due to the respect a man must show towards his sister; and the uneven economic reciprocity between the two former can be regarded as one means of expressing the nature of the ties connecting them. Here again this relationship, with the special rights of exploitation it confers in regard to property, is an argument against the existence of communism.

It is hardly necessary to stress any further the fact that the economic life of the Hottentots is really based upon the notion of private property. The problem now arises whether property belongs to the individual or to the family as a whole. Wandres categorically states that an individual owns nothing but his *oms*, soul or breath. All objects of common use—clothes, weapons, implements, and utensils—as well as the hut and the live stock are the collective property of the family. The individual has only the usufruct of, e.g. his clothes and his weapons, and has not the right to dispose of them or of anything else without the consent or knowledge of the rest of the family.[1] Vedder repeats this assertion in terms that are somewhat confusing: "Generally speaking we may say that the individual possesses nothing but is the usufructuary of what the family possesses. This even includes clothes and things for daily use. Under personal property one understands the possession of cattle. A child even may receive one or more goats from his father and he uses their milk. He has the right to milk such goats without permission, and their progeny are his property. Where natural conditions make it possible every person—man, wife, child—possesses a few goats, sheep or even cattle. When these are to be sold it becomes manifest that this personal property continues to be regarded as family property, because in such cases the whole family and not the individual decides whether there should be a sale or not."[2]

[1] "Ueber das Recht der Naman," 682–3.
[2] "The Nama," 144.